

Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) and Gov. Peter Shumlin (D-Vt.) issued the following statement today after the U.S. Postal Service announced plans to consolidate mail processing centers:

"We are extremely disturbed that the Postal Service intends to continue with its original plan to close the processing plant at White River Junction. We are pleased that the processing plant in Essex Junction was spared, but what we are saying loudly and clearly is that we will do all that we can to keep the White River Junction processing plant open as well.

"Importantly, the Postal Service statement made clear that, because of a moratorium on closings that a number of us in Congress demanded, there will be no closings until mid-May. Furthermore, the Postal Service also made it clear that the announcements are not final decisions and that Congress still has the opportunity to develop a new plan to prevent these closings.

"A Postal Service reform bill should be on the Senate floor within several weeks.

"The Postal Service statement said, 'implementation of this is contingent upon the outcome of proposed revisions to existing service standards. In addition, no implementation will take place prior to May 15 of this year, in keeping with the moratorium on closing or consolidating postal facilities, to give Congress and the administration the opportunity to enact an alternative plan.'

"We in Vermont are working with others in Congress on an alternative plan which will financially stabilize the Postal Service without counterproductive cuts in processing plants or slowing down mail delivery service. Our goal is to also protect most of the rural post offices that the Postal Service wants to eliminate, which are important to community life.

"A critical weakness of the current Postal Service plan is that it ignores the onerous financial burden being placed on the Postal Service by \$5.5 billion a year in pre-payments for future retiree health benefits. According to the Postal Service inspector general, those payments are no longer necessary because of the \$45 billion which that account already has accumulated."